



Fun for your Family

MARGARET BROOKS





Fun's a feeling

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DOES your family have fun together? Or do you agree with some folks who say there just isn't enough time in a day for family fun? Do you get the feeling that there are so many outside things to do that you seem to eat together and that's all? And does it sometimes seem that the fun described in books is pretty complicated? Do you occasionally say to yourself, "Well, so long as we're happy, does it matter whether we relax together or not?" If you're having some of these feelings, you're echoing what lots of family members are thinking these days. Maybe it would be worth a little time to think about what fun is and what it does for different members of a family. Maybe having fun isn't so complicated as you think.

What Is Fun?

Fun's a feeling. It's not just "things to do" or something you read in a book. It's a feeling deep down inside of you that bubbles over every once in a while. Fun is feeling that

- you can be yourself without self-consciousness
- you can do something you didn't think you could do
- you needn't be an expert to have fun

But, most of all, fun is a feeling that you *belong*

- you belong to a family
- you belong to a social group
- you belong to a whole world, always full of new things to be done in new ways
- you belong to a great group of folks who ride "hobby horses"

It seems only natural that the one place where you can pick up that feeling for fun is with the group you know best, with the group who knows you best—with your family.

And besides, having fun together really does help each member of the family in many ways.

What Does Family Fun Do: For Children?

"When I was a little girl, as far back as I can remember, Dad would come home from work and we would have all his things ready, his supper ready, and then, when we were all through with the dishes and everything, we sat

They learn that doing things for other people can
be fun

. that wanting to do things grows out
of a feeling of love and belonging

"We lived in a city, but Dad helped us build a fireplace in our tiny backyard, and there we used to cook supper together. Even when the babies were little, they were wheeled out in a carriage to join us."

They discover that working together can be fun too.

"Best of all our fun was the day we took Mom and Dad down to the lake. We kids knew how to swim, but they didn't. But they learned. We taught them. Now we have our own sailboat and we all can sail."

They find that parents like to play, too, but that
sometimes they have to learn how

. that Mom and Dad can be friends as
well as parents

. that all grown-ups can be fun

"And then there was the night that my sister and I sat up until two o'clock in the morning waiting for Mom and Dad to come home from a party. We had a lot of fun over that. They were hard put to explain to us why *we* should come in at midnight."

They discover that parents are people too

. that parents are willing to talk things
over

For Grown-ups?

"We have weekly discussions at which all of us make decisions—the choice of a new painting or what color to paint the bathroom or where to drive next Sunday. And it isn't always what my husband or I suggest that's decided upon. But whatever we decide, what we finally do seems to have more meaning and to be more fun because we've all planned it together."

Parents learn that children have good ideas and like to
share them

. sharing decisions with the whole family
makes daily living easier and more
relaxed

"I liked those days when John finished his work ahead of time. I'd put whatever we were going to have for supper in a basket, and we'd all go to the woods to eat."

They find that fun needn't be planned; it just
happens

"And so I went home that night and made some finger paints. I felt a little funny at first when Janie and Tim and I were getting the dining room



"Kid" stuff?

table ready for action. My husband laughed at me and said, 'What, you going artistic on me?' when I started working along with them. He stood around and teased me. Tim was splashing blue and red paint all over his paper, and all of a sudden said, 'Dad, why don't you try one? Bet yours won't be better than mine.' And before I knew it, all four of us were laughing as we swished the paint around the paper. John even 'painted' with his nose, and the kids imitated him. We dried the paintings and had an art exhibit the next night. I nearly popped when John dragged out the paintings one night when four of the neighbors dropped in. He was even bragging about his! And the next thing we knew, all six of us were around the dining room table having lots of fun."

They learn that "kid stuff" is fun

. that they can learn with their children
and discover brand new ways to enjoy
life—and their family

. that playing with their children helps
the children to see parents as real people

. that people of all ages can play together

For the Whole Family?

"Johnny, my fifteen-year-old boy, went to a party the other night and learned a new game—new to him. It's what we used to call charades. You act out book titles and people guess what they are. Well, last Sunday we had my in-laws for dinner: my husband's mother, father, and sister. After dinner Johnny wanted to play charades, and no one could think of a good reason not to. So we did. Surprised? Well, it was the best time we've all had together since we were married. I even asked for a few recipes from my mother-in-law, which I'd never had nerve enough to do before."

The whole family learns that a session of relaxed fun can relieve lots of tensions and worries

. that fun needn't be elaborate—it just happens

And everyone feels that this is *my* family, these people love me, and I can be *myself* with them

Where Can a Family Start Having Fun?

Like the families in the illustrations above, you start with what you have—a common interest in something. When the opportunity for laughing and relaxing comes, snatch it. Here are a few suggestions and materials that might help to increase your awareness of the many opportunities around you for "having fun together." But these are only suggestions; there are no limits set on kinds of fun. Each family has a different idea about its own fun. It's all a matter of what seems to fit your family.

Strictly among Yourselves

Even if your family members are all rugged individualists, there's still much to share, just because you do belong to one family. How about your

Fun for the whole family



family jokes, your family traditions, holiday customs, birthday parties, your "special event" celebrations? Those are the little things that loom so large in having fun. They're all important.

"Birthday parties have always been so nice at home that when we were little, we tried to have more than one birthday apiece each year. We could invite as many children in to have early supper as we were years old. . . ."

"In our family, the one who has the birthday gives the presents to others instead of receiving them."

"The first one of us home from school always used to lock the door and tease the rest."

All those are simple spontaneous happenings which sometimes just happen on the spur-of-the-moment and stay on as traditions, adding something to family feelings that didn't exist before.

Between the Lines

How about reading together? It's true that, to some of us, reading is a dismal duty—largely because we had to do it in school. But reading can be a magic flight into new worlds. And, when the family is all together for an hour or so, it's fun to read—not only books and stories, but plays and poems, too.

If you want a genuine family experience, try reading a play, with everyone taking different parts. It doesn't matter who takes what part. In fact, sometimes it's more fun to let Dad play the villain and Grandpa the handsome hero, to have Mom read the child's part and ten-year-old Johnnie play the heroine. Even the youngsters who can't read yet like this, to hear the rest of you "ham up" the lines.

Many times just starting with a magazine article or story works wonderfully since shortness is an asset until you all get the feel of reading together.

Between the lines, other worlds



Gradually you can work up to novels and the three-act plays. Here are a few good beginning reading lists:

A Book List for Parents. Cornell Extension Bulletin 802.

Bequest of Wings, a Family's Pleasure with Books. By Annis Duff. The Viking Press, New York, 1941.

Reading with Children. By A. T. Eaton. The Viking Press, New York, 1947. (About enjoying children's books with the appreciation of a child and with the wisdom of an adult.)

Choosing Book Friends. By F. C. Weed. Bulletin 180 of the Agricultural Extension Service, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Round the World with Books. By F. C. Weed. Bulletin 183 of the Agricultural Extension Service, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Remember, reading doesn't take experts; it just takes folks like your family and mine.

Music All Around You

"Today the wind is blowing in the key of G. Yesterday the birds chattered just when I wanted to sleep." Music is everywhere. Whether you like symphonic music, or swing, or be-bop, you can't escape music. And neither can your family—especially with radios in so many homes. But that kind of music is listening music. Some of you can make your own. It may sound horrible to outsiders, but to the group of you around the piano, it's a pretty sweet-sounding affair. Someone has said that there should be more bathtub singers, more poor piano players, more squeaky violins. You can learn to enjoy all kinds of music just from trying to create it yourselves—even though you'll never be a Stokowski or a Bing Crosby.

The old familiar songs, the harmonica, the radio—they all help you to start. And, if you have no musical instruments, find a book in the library which describes "kitchen bands." You can have a wonderful time with pots, pans, spoons, eggbeaters, glasses, and rhythm. Here are a few books to help you out:

Music as a Hobby. By F. B. Barton. Harper & Bros., New York, 1941.

Home Made Musical Instruments. By M. B. Fowler. Mimeograph C 9197, Extension Service, Department of Child Development and Family Relationships, New York State College of Home Economics, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Free.

There's Music in Children. By S. D. Sheehy. Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1946.

There's no place better than home to make your musical mistakes—and there's no place like home when you all let down your musical inhibitions and try.



Swing your partner

This Wonderful World

People write songs and poems and novels about this big wonderful world. But much of the time you just go on living in it without really seeing it. Every day, from infancy through old age, you're surrounded by things you take for granted. Each day offers a chance to reach out and grasp a new understanding of some part of the world. The whole family can explore it together.

In exploring, once you've opened your eyes and asked yourself "why?" or "how?" about just one part of the world, there'll be no limit to your curiosity. There's the earth-grass-water-rocks-birds-and-animals part of life. There's the sky and why things work the way they do and what's gone on before you were born. There are people to explore—how they grow, why they grow, why they behave the way they do. In New York State, the Indians have left a rich history which is fun to explore right around home.

Thousands of books have been written about thousands of things. Here are just a few. You'll find many, many more.

Children's Games from Many Lands, edited by Nina Millen. Friendship Press, New York, 1951. (Describes games played by boys and girls of other lands.)

Handbook of Nature Study. By A. B. Comstock. Comstock Publishing Company, 1947. (This is filled with references on plants, animals, earth, science, sky, and suggests simple experiments and observations for the family.)

Searching for Your Ancestors, the How and Why of Genealogy. By G. Doane. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1948. (You might enjoy this; at least it's different.)

One God, the Ways We Worship Him. By E. M. Fitch. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., New York, 1944. (A wonderful introduction to the different religions.)

How a Baby Grows, a Story in Pictures. By A. Gesell. Harper & Bros., New York, 1945. (Here's one part of the world we can't ignore.)

The Book of Nature Hobbies. By Ted Pettit. Didier, New York, 1947. (More than 200 suggestions for nature activities for the whole family.)

The world is full of millions of things—go find 'em.

We Made It Ourselves

The world of creative art, of making things, is one which somehow gets lost just as making your own music gets lost as you grow up. Again you feel, "Oh, leave that to the experts!"

But there are many creative materials for children and adults that families can work on together—even in limited living quarters. You can encourage creative ability by using some of the materials—even if Mom and Dad are as inexperienced as the children, or even not quite so good as the children. All of you might learn together as did the family who learned finger painting.

And there are many new and inexpensive materials for modeling and making pottery, materials that don't need baking or that can be baked in your

The world is full of millions of things





Finger or brush—it's still fun

own oven. There are fabric paints that are washable and porcelain paints that endure. Everyone is painting. Look at Winston Churchill and Grandma Moses. Here again, there's no limit, once you've started.

Try It Yourself. By Anderson. Y.W.C.A., 600 Lexington Ave., New York.

Creative Hands: An Introduction to Craft Techniques. By D. Cox and B. W. Weisman. John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1945.

The Home Crafts Handbook. By Ray E. Haines. D. Van Nostrand Co., New York, 1948.

Easy Crafts. By Ellsworth Jaeger. The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947.

Art Adventures with Discarded Materials. By E. K. Perry. Noble & Noble, New York, 1939. (This gives the whole family ideas on how to use up those odds and ends.)

Your Child Can Be Happy in Bed. By Cornelia Stratton Parker. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1952. (Over 200 ways to keep your child entertained. Useful when a child is sick, but also excellent source material for all children.)

These two Cornell mimeographs will help, too:

No. D 3283 *Suggestions for Art Materials to Be Used in the Home*

No. C 8621 *Creative Expression Materials*

You see, there's no limit to the things you can create—things that give you a chance to stand back and say, "See that? We did it ourselves!"

Hobbies

Here's one means by which you can really be yourself—as an individual or as a family. For example, there's a family in upstate New York who've gone frog-happy. The children dug a couple of fox holes in the back yard and suddenly a whole batch of frogs appeared. Now that family is reading

everything they can find about frogs. Silly? Perhaps, but it's fun for them, and it's something the whole family enjoys.

Individual hobbies are as varied as individuals. People collect everything from elephant hairs to "strange profiles" to Christmas cards. Your hobby needn't make sense to anyone else, so long as it gives you a good feeling of individuality and relaxation.

After you've chanced upon something interesting, and it's grown into a full-sized hobby, you'll have no difficulty finding the information you need in your library. But if you're just beginning to shop around for a personal or family pastime, here are a few places to start:

One Collector's Luck. By Larry Freeman. Century House, Watkins Glen, New York, 1946.

Giant Home Workshop Manual. Prepared by the Editorial Staff of the *Popular Science Monthly*, New York, 1943.

Hobbies for All Ages. By Olive Woodruff. Cornell mimeograph number C-8156.

Hobbies, a monthly magazine, 2810 South Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

The best thing about individual hobbies in families is that, although everyone's may be different, everyone else understands that a hobby is important to the fellow who has one.

Fun for Fun's Sake

Children say "Just for fun." Grown-ups sometimes have to relearn what "just for fun" means—being yourself without worrying what the other fellow thinks. Here's a kind of fun that children can teach parents—if they're willing to learn. Here parties and sports and dancing come in. True, you learn to get along with people at parties, you learn to do something in sports, you learn which is your left and which is your right foot in dancing—but, most of all, those things are fun whether you do them well or not.

Fun for fun's sake often just happens when you're in the mood for relaxation. But sometimes you want suggestions for family get-togethers or for larger parties. Here are a few sources of ideas. Let your imagination take you where it will. Forget yourself and have some fun.

The Fun Encyclopedia. E. O. Harbin. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, 1951. (Packed with ideas and leads to many other books too.)

Social Games for Recreation. By B. S. Mason and E. D. Mitchell. A. S. Barnes & Co., New York, 1935.

The Family Pleasure Chest. By Helen and Larry Eisenberg. Parthenon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1951. (1,000 family fun ideas.)

Many pamphlets from the National Recreation Association, 315 Fourth Avenue, New York City, are helpful. *Dinner Table Fun*, *Home Play*, and *Parties A to Z* are particularly good.

And this is perhaps the most fun of all—having fun for fun's sake, laughing together at and with each other because laughing is fun.

You're on Your Own Now

All these reference lists have purposely been limited for there are so many excellent resources that, were all of them listed here, you'd be discouraged before you began. These few will give you a good start and will lead you further, if you want to go further.

But your most important source of information hasn't been mentioned—your local library and your local librarian. Your librarian is your best friend when it comes to finding out about books you want, information you need, ideas and suggestions you'd like. And if you have no local library, the New York State Traveling Library in Albany, New York, will be happy to help, to send you information and books, too.

You may find these services and these organizations helpful also.

Program Pointers, a quarterly sheet of suggestions for having fun, can be mailed to you from your local County Extension Office. Just ask your County Home Demonstration Agent to put your name on her mailing list for that service. This material is prepared by members of the Department of Rural Sociology at Cornell, and, although the material is directed primarily to group activities, often you will find suggestions usable within your own family circle.

Should you want help about some specific thing, you can write a direct letter, explaining what information you need, to the

Department of Rural Sociology
Warren Hall, Room 316
New York State College of Agriculture
Ithaca, New York

Other suggestions for family fun are available from the
Department of Child Development and
Family Relationships, Extension Service
New York State College of Home Economics
Ithaca, New York

Finally, these national organizations will be invaluable to you in your search for materials:

National Recreation Association
315 Fourth Avenue
New York City

American Association for Health,
Physical Education, and Recreation
Washington, D. C.

Hobby Guild of America
34 West 33rd Street
New York City

National Wildlife Federation
Washington, D. C.

American Library Association
520 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Cooperative Recreation Service
Delaware, Ohio

From now on, it's up to you. Relax . . . let down your hair . . .
have fun.

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